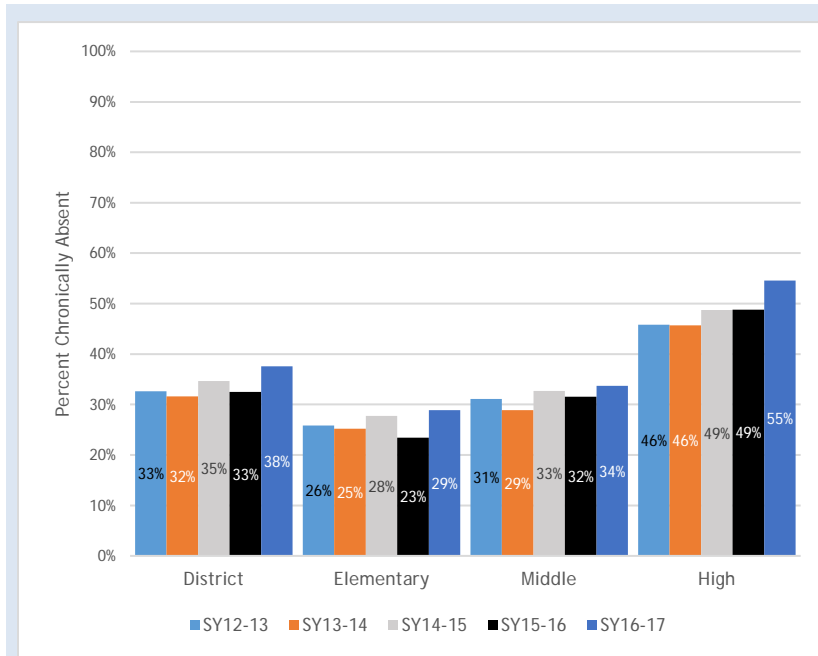


Chronic Absenteeism in Providence Public Schools

Key findings

- Districtwide chronic absence rates worsened in SY16-17 to 37.6% from 32.5% in SY15-16.
- All but four schools saw their chronic absence rates rise.
 - The four schools with a rate decline were: Robert F. Kennedy and Vartan Gregorian Elementary Schools and Esek Hopkins and Nathanael Greene Middle Schools.
- For the first time in SY16-17, EL Students' rate of chronic absenteeism increased to similar levels of Non-EL students.
- Over half of students enrolled at PPSD for all school years between SY12-13 and SY16-17 were chronically absent in at least one of those school years.

Overview

Chronic absenteeism is among the most pressing issues facing schools nationwide. A release of national chronic absence data found that 14% of all US students, or over 7 million students, were chronically absent in SY13-14.¹ These national findings coupled with over a decade of research from districts around the nation highlight the need for collective action to confront high absence rates in the country's schools.

Locally, reducing chronic absenteeism is a top priority for the Providence Public School District. Across the District, the implementation of programs and transformation of practices can reduce student absences and reduce lost instructional minutes.

The purpose of this data brief is to provide chronic absenteeism rates for the Providence Public School District for school years 2012-2013 through 2016-2017.

Why is Chronic Absenteeism important?

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of days enrolled during a school year, including excused and unexcused absences and out-of-school suspensions.² For example, a student enrolled for 180 school days who misses at least 18 days of school is considered chronically absent. There are many reasons students miss school: physical ailments particularly due to asthma or oral health; a lack of understanding the importance of attending school, particularly at the Kindergarten level; and avoiding school due to feeling unsafe.³

No matter the reason, missing school negatively impacts students' academic achievement and likelihood to graduate. The negative impact starts early in a school year; if a student is absent several days in September they are more likely to be chronically absent for the year.⁴ The negative impact also starts in the early years of schooling. By first grade, students' attendance is an indicator of their likelihood to graduate.⁵ Chronic absence negatively impacts literacy development and students who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to dropout.⁶ A national review of NAEP testing found that 4th grade students absent 3 or more days

one month prior to the assessment scored a full grade level lower than students who were not absent.⁷

Researchers Cheng and Balfanz analyzed national CRDC data and found that half of all chronically absent students were located in just 4% of the nation's school districts. Among those 4% of districts, nearly half were urban areas with high child poverty rates and high rates of students of color. The other half of districts were in suburban areas with growing low-incomes and diverse populations. Cranston, Providence and Woonsocket, Rhode Island school districts were among the 4% of districts nationwide and accounted for half of the chronically absent students in Rhode Island in SY13-14.^{8,9}

Locally, the Rhode Island DataHUB produced a data story on chronic absenteeism and found that chronically absent Kindergartners were 20 percentage points lower in reading than their non-chronically absent peers, 25 percentage points lower in mathematics, two times more likely to be retained, two times more likely to be suspended by the end of seventh grade, and more likely to continue being chronically absent.¹⁰

Prior research finds students from high-poverty urban districts have higher rates of chronic absence.¹¹ Considering that 86% of PPSD students are eligible for subsidized lunch¹², this adds context to the high rates of chronic absenteeism in Providence. Consequently, it is imperative that chronic absenteeism be addressed in Providence Public Schools.

Some District efforts to address chronic absenteeism have been shown to have an impact. Since 2011, PPSD has collected and disseminated chronic absenteeism data to various schools and community stakeholders. PPSD began raising awareness about the need to address chronic absenteeism by hosting a day-long workshop in fall 2011 with Hedy Chang, a national leader in the campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism. An in-depth strategy session was held with principals in March 2012 to encourage them to create school-based data teams and incorporate chronic absence goals into their school improvement plans. From fall 2012 through SY13-14 a number of high schools partnered with Get Schooled¹³ and two won the national competition. One high school winner, Mount Pleasant, experienced a 27 percentage point reduction between SY10-11 and SY13-14, from 69.4 to 42.2 respectively.

Other school-based efforts include programs to mentor students and cross-sector representation on school-based attendance teams (e.g., Fogarty and Lillian Feinstein elementary schools). In SY16-17, Esek Hopkins Middle School implemented several strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism. The school implemented a cross-sector attendance team led by the school guidance department including principals, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. The team monitored daily attendance and called parents; they conferenced with students and provided

rewards and incentives for school attendance. The nurse, social worker, and psychologist made home visits, and if necessary, the school sent students to truancy court. While we have not measured which strategies had the greatest impact, we do find that the school had a 5.4 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism, the largest decline in the district for SY16-17, in a year when all but four schools saw increases.

District Findings

DISTRICTWIDE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES WORSENERD IN SY16-17 TO 37.6% FROM 32.5% IN SY15-16.

After observing a decline in chronic absenteeism rates for the previous school year, rates of chronic absenteeism climbed to a five-year high in SY16-17. Over one-third or 37.6% of students who were enrolled and attended at least one school day were chronically absent, an increase of 5.1 percentage points.

High School and Elementary School students saw higher increases than Middle School students. High School students had a 5.7 percentage point increase and Elementary School students had an increase of 5.4 percentage points while Middle School students saw an increase of 2.2 percentage points.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG STUDENTS ENROLLED 90 DAYS OR MORE INCREASED FROM 30.9% IN SY15-16 TO 35.9% IN SY16-17.

The Rhode Island Department of Education calculates rates of chronic absenteeism only for students who were enrolled 90 days or more of the school year. RIDE recently calculated PPSD's chronic absence rate at 35.2%. PPSD is unable to exactly replicate the RIDE figure because RIDE uses an average daily membership as the denominator which is not publicly available.

Most of the students who enrolled at PPSD during SY16-17 were enrolled at least half of the school year, or at least 90 school days. Of the nearly 25,500 students who enrolled at any point during SY16-17, 2,037 (8%) were enrolled for fewer than 90 days. For students who were enrolled at PPSD at least 90 school days, 35.9% were chronically absent. 53.2% of High school students who were enrolled 90 days or more were chronically absent. 33.1% of Middle school students enrolled 90 days or more were chronically absent as were 26.8% of Elementary school students who were enrolled at least half of the school year.

PPSD also analyzed chronic absenteeism rates for students at different levels of days enrolled. Depending on the range of days enrolled per student, the overall chronic absence rate ranged from 35.9% for students enrolled 90 days or more to 37.6% for students who were enrolled and attended at least one day of school. The table below shows how the chronic absence rates differ when using a different number of days enrolled as a criteria for inclusion in the calculation.

	SY2016-2017 Pct of Students Chronically Absent by Days Enrolled					
	1 Day+	15 Days+	30 Days+	45 Days+	60 Days+	90 Days+
Elem	28.9%	28.4%	28.0%	27.7%	27.4%	26.8%
Midd	33.7%	33.8%	33.7%	33.6%	33.3%	33.1%
High	54.6%	54.7%	54.4%	54.2%	53.9%	53.2%
Total	37.6%	37.4%	37.0%	36.8%	36.5%	35.9%

NEARLY ALL SCHOOLS SAW THEIR CHRONIC ABSENCE RATES RISE.

Thirty-nine out of forty-three schools saw their chronic absence rate rise in SY16-17. Four schools saw their rates decline: Robert F. Kennedy and Vartan Gregorian Elementary Schools and Esek Hopkins and Nathanael Greene Middle Schools.

Of those that saw their chronic absence rates increase, three schools saw their rates rise less than 1 percentage point: Asa Messer and Robert L. Bailey Elementary Schools and Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School.

Five schools saw their chronic absence rates increase by more than 10 percentage points: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Harry Kizirian Elementary schools, West Broadway Middle School, and 360 High school.¹⁴

STUDENTS WERE ABSENT A GREATER NUMBER OF DAYS.

Over the past five school years there has been an increase in the number of days absent per student.

In SY16-17, 501 additional students were absent 30 days or more as compared to SY15-16. Students who were absent zero days declined by 250 between the two school years. (See Appendix C for table)

EL STUDENTS’ RATE OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM INCREASED TO SIMILAR LEVELS OF NON-EL STUDENTS.

In years prior, EL Students’ rate of chronic absenteeism was notably lower than the rate of Non-EL students. However, in SY16-17, EL Students’ rate of chronic absenteeism was less than one percentage point lower than non-EL students: Non-EL students had a chronic absenteeism rate of 37.8% and the EL students’ rate was 36.9%.

OVER HALF OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT PPSD FOR ALL SCHOOL YEARS BETWEEN SY12-13 AND SY16-17 WERE CHRONICALLY ABSENT IN AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE SCHOOL YEARS.

Attendance data for SY12-13 through SY16-17 was joined together for all students; over 11,700 students had data for each of the five school years. Of those students who had data for all five school years: 54% were chronically absent at least one of those school years. Nine percent of students were considered chronically absent every year between SY12-13 and SY16-17.

ON AVERAGE, CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS LOST APPROXIMATELY 10,840 INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES AND WERE ABSENT AN AVERAGE OF 33 SCHOOL DAYS.

Chronically absent students in elementary schools lost on average over 8,200 instructional minutes equating to 25 missed school days. Middle School students who were chronically absent lost over 10,200 instructional minutes or 31 days on average. Chronically absent high school students lost more than 13,350 instructional minutes, an average of 40 days.

CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS WERE LESS LIKELY TO BE PROFICIENT ON THE PARCC ASSESSMENT.

Students with high rates of absenteeism are less likely to be proficient on the Math or English Language Arts (ELA) PARCC assessment than students with lower absenteeism rates. For students with low rates of absenteeism, 24% were proficient on ELA and 21% were proficient on Math. Comparatively, 5% of students with excessive rates of absenteeism were proficient on ELA and 3% were proficient on Math.

Absence Level	% Proficient on PARCC in SY16-17 by Absence Level in SY16-17	
	ELA	Math
Low (<5%)	24%	21%
Moderate (5% to <10%)	17%	13%
Chronic (10% to <20%)	10%	7%
Excessive (>=20%)	5%	3%

Data and Definitions

Data Sample Students who were enrolled in grades K – 12 in a Providence school (including ACE and Times2 charters beginning SY14-15) at any point during the school year were included. This includes any student that was enrolled for at least one day and attended a school for at least one day. Exceptions include students who were enrolled but never showed for at least one day and since SY11-12, students that were physically educated at facilities other than the ‘home’ school as identified by their homeroom in the student information system (e.g., Alternative Learning Plan, Virtual Credit Recovery with dropout status, YouthBuild). Students at the AVenture program are included in the District and grade level analyses and AVenture is reported as a separate school.

Overall attendance data for the year for each student was used for district level calculations (summed across all schools of attendance). Attendance data for each student at every school attended was used for school calculations (student attendance record assigned only to a school for the period of time when they were enrolled there).

Chronic Absence Definition For the purpose of this brief, students fall into one of four mutually exclusive absenteeism groups. Because students who are absent at least 10% of the time are at increased risk for negative outcomes, chronic and excessively absent students are reported together as chronically absent for purposes of this discussion.

Low	Students who are absent fewer than 5% of the days they are enrolled for all students enrolled and attended at least 1 school day.
Moderate	Students who are absent 5% to < 10% of the days they are enrolled for all students enrolled and attended at least 1 school day.
Chronic	Students who are absent 10% to < 20% of the days they are enrolled for all students enrolled and attended at least 1 school day.
Excessive	Students who are absent at least 20% of the days that they are enrolled for all students enrolled and attended at least 1 school day.

Next Steps & Recommendations

This report highlights the magnitude of the chronic absenteeism issue in Providence’s schools. Based on the findings, reducing chronic absence rates should remain a priority area for the District. The findings also highlight the need to study the impact of school-based programs and initiatives currently underway throughout the District.

The District has included reducing chronic absence as one of its goals in its strategic plan. By 2021, the district aims to reduce students’ chronic absenteeism rate (RIDE calculated) by 7 points. A working group has convened in the district to oversee district strategies and efforts and to monitor the progression toward this goal. The District is also working with partners such as CityYear Providence and the Providence Children’s Youth Cabinet who support the work focused on reducing chronic absenteeism.

Limitations

The definition of Chronic Absence used in this report differs slightly from the definition used by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Whereas PPSD calculates chronic absence for all students who were enrolled and attended a district school for at least one day, RIDE calculates chronic absenteeism for students enrolled 90 days or more and uses Average Daily Membership for its denominator. PPSD does not use an average for its denominator but uses all students enrolled for at least one day at any point in the school year who attended school at least one day.

To date, efforts to reduce chronic absence have not been consistently monitored or evaluated. Observed differences between the school years may be due to cohort fluctuations, data collection methods, or chance, which should be considered when drawing inferences or conclusions. For example, data collection of attendance should be uniform across schools. In SY11-12 a systematic change in the method for inputting attendance data at the high school level was implemented. A 7.1 percentage point decrease in chronic absence at the high school level from SY10-11 to SY11-12 may have been the result of more accurate data collection and/or it could indicate improvement based on intentional efforts.

The implementation of the new student information system in SY14-15 was an opportunity to provide clear guidelines for collecting data at all Providence schools. However, challenges with the implementation of the new system may have

impacted the rates in that year; Esek Hopkins middle school may be an example as well as The Academy for Career Exploration (ACE) and Times2 Charter Schools.

Notes and References

1. These figures have been updated since PPSD's October 2016 Chronic Absenteeism report. The State of Florida and the New York City School Department updated their US Civil Rights Data Collection figures including rates of chronically absent students.
2. Chang, H. (December, 2011). Reducing the achievement gap and school drop out: The imperative for reducing chronic absence starting with school entry. Invited presentation to Providence Public Schools.
3. Mapping the Early Attendance Gap: Charting a Course for Student Success. Attendance Works & Healthy Schools Campaign, September 2015.
4. [Olson, L. S. \(2014\). *Why September Matters: Improving Student Attendance*. Baltimore Education Research Consortium Policy Brief.](#)
5. Schoeneberger, J. A. (2011). Longitudinal Attendance Patterns: Developing High School Dropouts. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 85(1), 7-14.
6. Hernandez, D. A. (April 2012). *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.
7. [Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P., & Chang, H \(2014\). *Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success*.](#) AttendanceWorks.
8. Chang&Balfanz (2016). *Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence*. Attendance Works, John Hopkins University, and Everyone Graduates Center.
9. Note: The definition of Chronic Absence in Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the national data used in the Chang&Balfanz report, differs from previous work of Chang&Balfanz and PPSD. The definition in the national dataset is missing 15 days or more from school.
10. Accessed online at: <http://ridatahub.org/datastories/chronic-absenteeism-in-kindergarten/2/>
11. Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.
12. InfoWorks, Rhode Island Education Data Reporting, October 1st, 2016 for SY16-17. <http://infoworks.ride.ri.gov/district/providence>
13. Get Schooled is a non-profit organization that uses media to encourage student attendance. Website: <https://getschooled.com/>

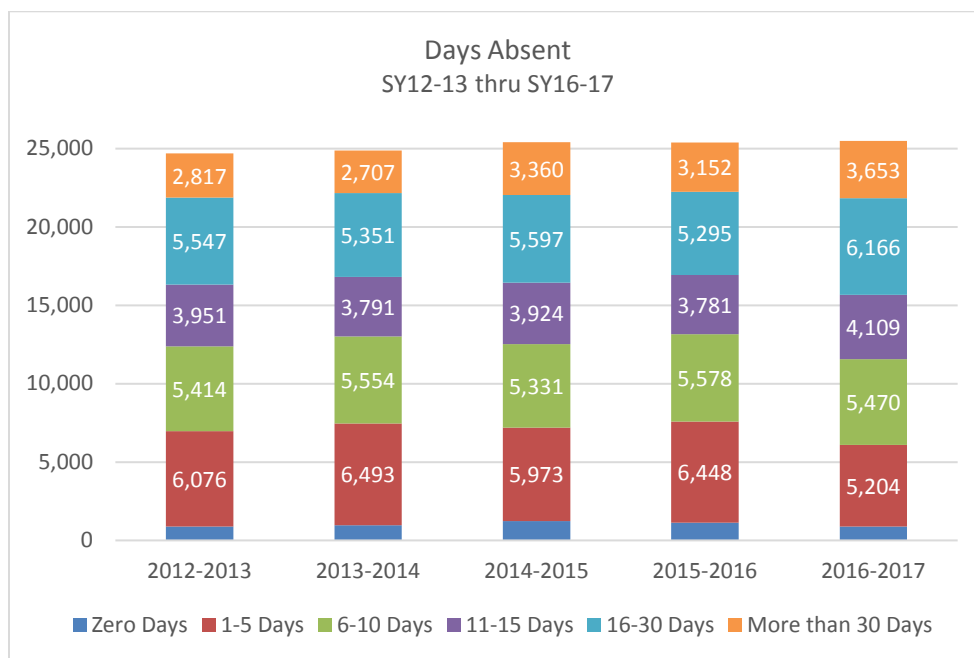
Appendix A: Chronic Absenteeism by School for SY12-13 through SY16-17

Percent of Students Chronically Absent by School						
Elementary	SY12-13	SY13-14	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17	Change SY15-16 to SY16-17
Alan Shawn Feinstein (Broad)	28.0%	23.8%	29.0%	22.6%	29.9%	↑
Alfred Lima	26.7%	24.5%	29.8%	26.7%	30.7%	↑
Anthony Carnevale	23.5%	27.1%	29.2%	24.4%	29.9%	↑
Asa Messer	28.4%	24.6%	31.0%	30.8%	31.7%	↑
Carl G. Lauro	32.0%	30.6%	31.8%	28.0%	34.3%	↑
Charles Fortes	42.1%	35.5%	39.8%	30.3%	33.2%	↑
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	27.6%	27.2%	33.8%	23.7%	34.9%	↑
Frank Spaziano	17.5%	18.5%	23.8%	20.3%	24.1%	↑
George J. West	26.7%	31.0%	25.9%	26.8%	33.8%	↑
Harry Kizirian	34.5%	28.5%	34.9%	28.4%	39.7%	↑
Leviton Dual Language	8.3%	12.7%	14.7%	16.6%	19.9%	↑
Lillian Feinstein (Sackett)	22.0%	25.2%	27.8%	19.8%	25.6%	↑
Mary Fogarty	27.3%	32.0%	31.7%	24.4%	33.6%	↑
Pleasant View	30.8%	32.4%	30.6%	24.5%	29.4%	↑
Reservoir Avenue	17.4%	13.6%	16.7%	16.1%	19.2%	↑
Robert F. Kennedy	22.0%	21.7%	23.2%	19.1%	17.9%	↓
Robert L. Bailey	31.1%	30.2%	34.1%	26.1%	26.3%	↑
Times 2 Elementary	6.8%	11.5%	11.0%	7.8%	12.1%	↑
Vartan Gregorian	13.5%	14.5%	22.5%	19.3%	18.8%	↓
Veazie Street	33.9%	32.4%	33.2%	29.4%	36.4%	↑
Webster Avenue	26.0%	20.4%	26.1%	25.3%	32.0%	↑
William D'Abate	17.5%	16.2%	17.1%	18.0%	23.8%	↑
Woods/Young	35.7%	31.6%	27.1%	25.0%	28.1%	↑
Middle	SY12-13	SY13-14	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17	
Del Sesto	39.3%	36.9%	37.3%	34.9%	39.3%	↑
Esek Hopkins	35.3%	37.3%	42.7%	38.0%	32.5%	↓
Gilbert Stuart	32.9%	32.3%	33.0%	36.7%	38.4%	↑
Nathan Bishop	24.6%	22.4%	31.6%	32.9%	38.6%	↑
Nathanael Greene	28.5%	24.4%	32.5%	29.1%	25.7%	↓
Roger Williams	34.3%	32.7%	37.3%	36.2%	39.5%	↑
Times 2 Middle	12.4%	20.8%	0.8%	6.4%	15.6%	↑
West Broadway	NA	NA	21.2%	26.4%	37.7%	↑
High	SY12-13	SY13-14	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17	
360 High School	NA	NA	NA	48.3%	60.8%	↑
Academy for Career Exploration	33.0%	21.9%	47.8%	24.7%	38.5%	↑
Central	61.2%	60.4%	60.6%	62.0%	64.3%	↑
Classical	19.1%	21.4%	27.0%	22.3%	30.1%	↑
Dr. Jorge Alvarez	57.7%	56.4%	49.1%	51.5%	51.7%	↑
E Cubed Academy	48.0%	44.6%	44.4%	42.0%	49.3%	↑
Evolutions	NA	NA	NA	58.0%	60.7%	↑
Hope	56.0%	56.7%	61.9%	65.1%	69.6%	↑
JSEC	49.7%	53.1%	54.3%	63.9%	70.0%	↑
Mount Pleasant	49.0%	42.2%	48.4%	50.9%	58.6%	↑
Providence Career and Technical	46.6%	46.6%	50.8%	46.1%	47.9%	↑
Times 2 High	15.0%	18.6%	7.9%	14.0%	30.3%	↑
Aventure	NA	85.7%	65.6%	48.3%	42.9%	↓

Appendix B: Chronic Absenteeism by School Level and Grade

School Level/Grade	Percent of Students Chronically Absent				
	SY12-13	SY13-14	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17
DISTRICT	32.6%	31.6%	34.7%	32.5%	37.6%
ELEMENTARY	25.9%	25.2%	27.8%	23.4%	28.9%
MIDDLE	31.1%	29.1%	32.7%	31.5%	33.7%
HIGH	45.8%	45.6%	48.7%	48.8%	54.6%
	SY12-13	SY13-14	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17
Kindergarten	35.1%	32.5%	37.4%	29.9%	36.7%
Grade 1	27.1%	26.9%	30.4%	26.2%	31.7%
Grade 2	24.2%	23.5%	27.0%	23.0%	28.3%
Grade 3	23.2%	21.5%	25.2%	22.9%	26.7%
Grade 4	22.2%	22.3%	22.7%	18.9%	25.8%
Grade 5	22.5%	24.3%	23.7%	20.3%	25.6%
Grade 6	26.6%	25.8%	29.2%	27.2%	29.6%
Grade 7	33.8%	29.6%	34.1%	34.2%	35.2%
Grade 8	33.0%	31.4%	35.0%	33.4%	35.8%
Grade 9	47.9%	46.4%	43.9%	47.3%	51.9%
Grade 10	46.0%	43.4%	50.4%	46.0%	53.4%
Grade 11	44.9%	45.6%	51.2%	51.1%	54.4%
Grade 12	43.7%	47.3%	51.1%	52.4%	61.1%

Appendix C: Days Absent for SY 2012-2013 through SY 2016-2017



Appendix D: Chronic Absenteeism by Demographic Subgroups

Demographics		Percent of Students Chronically Absent				
		SY12-13 ⁺	SY13-14 ⁺	SY14-15	SY15-16	SY16-17
Sex	Female	32.0%	30.2%	33.8%	31.4%	37.1%
	Male	33.2%	32.9%	35.5%	33.6%	38.1%
Race*	Hispanic	33.5%	32.4%	35.2%	33.4%	38.5%
	Black	30.0%	28.9%	30.8%	28.2%	32.4%
	White	32.2%	31.9%	37.7%	34.4%	39.5%
	Southeast Asian	27.4%	27.2%	30.5%	28.0%	32.8%
	Asian/Pacific Isl. (non-SEA)	19.1%	17.2%	25.3%	23.3%	31.6%
	Multi-Racial	39.6%	37.3%	40.3%	37.9%	43.6%
	Native Am.	47.6%	53.7%	52.7%	46.3%	56.2%
Lunch Status	Free Lunch	34.2%	33.2%	36.3%	34.3%	39.6%
	Reduced Lunch	15.1%	15.5%	21.7%	19.0%	24.4%
	Paid Lunch	NA	NA	31.0%	28.5%	32.6%
ELL Status*	Non-ELL	34.1%	32.8%	36.2%	33.1%	37.8%
	ELL	25.9%	25.7%	29.6%	30.4%	36.9%
IEP Status	Non-IEP	30.7%	29.5%	32.9%	30.9%	36.0%
	IEP	43.0%	43.7%	44.4%	42.5%	47.7%

+Chronic Absent calculations updated from previous briefs

*Race now disaggregated to include Southeast Asian students; ELL status removes monitored students from inclusion as an ELL in SY14-15, 15-16, 16-17.